

Jens Ljunggren (Stockholm) über:

## The »Good« Left-Wing Intellectual

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### The »Left-Wing Intellectual« in Post-War Sweden from the 1940s to the 1970s

#### Abstract

In this article I will examine the forming and positioning of »the left-wing intellectual« in Sweden from the late 1940s until the late 1970s. My main focus lies *first* on »the intellectual« as a social type, that is, ideal concepts of what it meant to be a »left-wing intellectual«, and *second* on the position of left-wing intellectuals within Swedish public debate. The Swedish intellectual setting changed rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s, when young radicals, by connecting Sweden to European culpability regarding the horrors of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, created a new and firm left intellectual stance. Suddenly the radical left dominated Sweden's intellectual debate, and became influential since the Swedish state and the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) adopted a strategy of collaboration. The ideal of the »good left-wing intellectual«, was pictured in terms of state collaboration, reformism, sociability and being a »cultural worker« rather than a high-brow intellectual confrontation. This type could easily interact with the state while simultaneously reaching parts of the population and satisfying the media establishment – all of which strengthened the left-wing intellectuals' public and cultural significance.

#### Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel analysiere ich die Herausbildung und Positionierung des »Linksintellektuellen« in Schweden, ausgehend von den 1940er Jahren bis in die 1970er. Hierbei steht *erstens* der soziale Typus des »Intellektuellen« im Vordergrund meiner Analyse, d.h. die Frage, was diesen idealerweise ausmache, und *zweitens* die Position des Linksintellektuellen im öffentlichen Diskurs. In den 1960er und 1970er Jahren änderte sich das intellektuelle Klima in Schweden jäh, als junge Linksradikale auch Schweden in Verbindung mit europäischer Schuld brachten und damit einen neuen und eindeutig linken Standpunkt setzten. Plötzlich übernahm die Linke die intellektuelle Führungsrolle in Schweden, die auch durch die Integrationsstrategie des Staates und der Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei Schwedens (SAP) begünstigt wurde. Das Idealbild von »dem guten Linksintellektuellen«, basierte demnach auf Zusammenarbeit, Reformismus, Nahbarkeit und der Vorstellung eines »Kulturarbeiters« anstelle einer dezidiert akademischen Prägung. Dieses Ideal eines (Links)Intellektuellen erlangte aufgrund seiner erfolgreichen Interaktion mit der Bevölkerung und mit den etablierten Medien eine große Bedeutung im öffentlichen und im kulturellen Bereich.

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## The »Good« Left-Wing Intellectual

»Must culture always be left?« The Swedish writer and journalist Bengt Olsson asked this provocative question in 2012.<sup>1</sup> The debate that followed was extensive, but far from original. On several occasions since the 1970s, the strength of the left-wing intellectual has been intensely debated and, with good reason, it has been suggested that there exists a leftist hegemony within Swedish cultural debate.<sup>2</sup> This raises questions about the »anatomy« of the Swedish intellectual left and how it managed to achieve cultural dominance. In this article, I will deal with these questions by focusing on the construction and the position of »the left-wing intellectual« in Sweden from the end of the war until the late 1970s. What leftist intellectual ideals were created during this period and how did these ideals relate to the position of »the left-wing intellectual« in Sweden's public and cultural debate?

### Research on Swedish Intellectuals

It is not difficult to find studies on Swedish intellectuals and their thoughts, but historical research on »the intellectual« as a social type in Sweden is rare. There are some studies that deal specifically with »the intellectual« in the period after World War II. Christer Skoglund and Thomas Forser argue that »the intellectual« was not a very prominent figure in Sweden from the mid-war period until the 1980s. Conflicts were not absent but, on the whole, intellectuals and politicians interacted quite harmoniously in a spirit of consent.<sup>3</sup> The historian Kjell Östberg has studied the relationship between the left-wing intellectuals and the Swedish Social Democratic Party (*Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti*, SAP) during the 1960s and 1970s. He argues that, by distancing themselves from the SAP and by supporting new social movements, radical intellectuals gained a foothold in the public debate.<sup>4</sup> In that context, Thomas Ekman Jörgensen underlines some internal differences between the Scandinavian countries, for instance, that the protest movement in Denmark had a more intellectual and urban approach than in Sweden.<sup>5</sup> Maoism was the dominant ideology in Sweden and Norway and therefore the protesters focused particularly on the need to mobilize the common people. Östberg suggests that the movement of 1968 strengthened the concept of the leftist intellectual in Sweden, while Ekman Jörgensen, from his comparative perspective, emphasizes that the leftist intellectual had a rather weak standing in Sweden at this time.

In this article, I will scrutinize more extensively than in previous research what happened to »the left-wing intellectual« in Sweden from the late 1940s until the late 1970s. Also, I will compare left-wing intellectual ideals in Sweden to those in contemporary France and Germany. Here, my main focus is *first* »the intellectual« as a social type, or rather ideal concepts of what it meant to be a »left-wing intellectual«, and *second* the position of left-wing intellectuals within Swedish public debate. In doing so, the intellectual role is defined as a normative

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<sup>1</sup> Olsson 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Frenander 1999; Hultén & Samuelsson 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Forser 1993; Skoglund 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Östberg 2002a.

<sup>5</sup> Jörgensen 2008.

standard with regard to the character and ambition of an intellectual and its purpose in society. This also includes how intellectuals are supposed or expected to relate to political parties, institutions and various social strata. Furthermore, questions about what expressions to use, what political agendas to further and what channels to work through are equally relevant.

The analysis focuses on the public discussion about the purpose and meaning of being an intellectual. Such discussions are not only found in books and articles written by intellectuals themselves, but also in periodicals and the daily press. The shaping of intellectual ideals and the positioning of the »left-wing intellectual« was a rather reciprocal process that took place among intellectuals, journalists and activists who reacted to each other's propositions.

### Post-War Left-Wing Intellectual Mobilization

The Second World War has continued to shape national as well as intellectual identities for a long time after its end in 1945. In France and Germany, feelings of war guilt were extremely important for the mobilization of left-wing intellectuals. As François Furet explains, French post-war communism presented itself as a persistent resistance movement and was directed against wartime collaborators. Communism was a way for intellectuals to position themselves as anti-fascist and to distance themselves from the bourgeoisie while remaining part of a patriotic French revolutionary heritage. The communist party in France (PCF) successfully set out to organize intellectuals, and prominent highbrows such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir or Maurice Merleau-Ponty soon became left-wing icons.<sup>6</sup>

Jürgen Habermas argues that »the intellectual« as a social type was not accepted in Germany until after the war. Even though his argument has been questioned, it is clear that authors and academics in post-war Germany actively began to define themselves as intellectuals. Prominent intellectuals promoted what is known under the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Germans would have to deal with their war-guilt and take responsibility for the future. In the late 1940s, a group of intellectuals, calling itself *Gruppe 47*, began to meet regularly. In their own eyes, they constituted a democratic elite and were outspoken about their determination to build a new and better Germany. The critical revision of German history gathered quite considerably pace from the 1960s onwards. For this, the Frankfurt School was essential in shaping left-wing intellectualism, consisting of prominent intellectuals such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. At large, the afore-mentioned German intellectuals showed a non-communist, although radical left inclination.<sup>7</sup>

The positioning of left-wing intellectuals in post-war Sweden followed a completely different logic. On the whole, feelings of war guilt did not influence the political debate.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the presence of a strong social

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<sup>6</sup> Drake 2002, pp. 13–16, 27–38, 40–43; Furet 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas 1986; Cofalla 1999, 2000; Clark 2006; Rabinbach 2003, p. 30; Giesen 1993, pp. 237–239; Hertfelder 2000, p. 27; Trommler 1991; Pape 2000; Lanfer 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Johansson 2006; Östling 2007.

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democratic party steered Sweden's 20<sup>th</sup>-century history, integrating various academics. At the beginning of the 20th century, radical writers and academics dreamt of a new society based on justice, equality, and freedom of thought. This ideology of »cultural radicalism« promoted rationality, reason, science, and materialism – values that were equally attractive to the SAP. The party attracted and engaged a fair number of radical intellectuals. Establishing itself as a governing party in the 1930s, it was crucial for the SAP to build up a trustworthy base of civil servants and therefore it also recruited academics. »The social engineer« became an attractive role for party intellectuals. The two most renowned social democratic social engineers at the time were Alva and Gunnar Myrdal.<sup>9</sup>

According to Christer Skoglund and Thomas Forser, the intellectuals had to pay a price for being part of the social democratic project. The SAP wanted to take advantage of its academics, but without letting them become too powerful, which meant that intellectuals were integrated into the party, but to some extent also marginalized and restrained. Therefore, an intellectual climate arose, marked not only by moderation and harmony, but also by the marginalization of positions considered »too extreme«. Highly respected political norms in Sweden were consensus and rationality.<sup>10</sup>

Beside this, two non-party associations had a particular influence on Swedish intellectual life. *Svenska Clartéförbundet* was a socialist organization, founded in 1921 with the aim of furthering socialism and world peace. Several distinguished Swedish intellectuals and politicians were *Clarté* members, and some of them were later to become prominent supporters of the 1968 upheaval. For a long period of time, *Clarté* was an open association wide in scope. Another association that was of considerable importance in post-war Sweden was *Verdandi*, particularly during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. *Verdandi* started out as a liberal students' club in Uppsala in 1886, initiated by the liberal politician Karl Staaff. Its aim was to bring together liberals and representatives of the workers' movement and to defend the freedom of speech and thought. The historian Nils Runeby has argued that *Verdandi* had a particularly strong impact on the public debate in post-war Sweden. According to him, the reason was that so-called »cultural radicals« and members of the association upheld predominant positions in Sweden's public debate at that time. Among its members were distinguished writers, publicists, and journalists, such as Ivar Harrie, Lennart Hartman, Tor Bonnier, Olof Lagercrantz, Vilhelm Moberg and Ture Nerman. The most prominent of them in the 1950s were two liberal/social democratic intellectuals who dominated the public debates: the philosopher Ingemar Hedenius and the publicist and political scientist Herbert Tingsten.<sup>11</sup>

Characteristic of Sweden's political and cultural debate in the 1950s was however its strong anti-communism. The 1950s in Sweden started off with an intense debate about the so-called »third point of view« between the U.S. and

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<sup>9</sup> Sigurdson 2000, pp. 44–79; Nolin 1999; Tjäder 1999; Forser 1993, pp. 148–149; Skoglund 1991, pp. 53–61; Nerman 1967; Östberg 2002a, pp. 88–91.

<sup>10</sup> Forser 1993, pp. 135–138, 148–153; Skoglund 1991, pp. 26–27, 129–130, 209–210.

<sup>11</sup> Runeby 1985.

the Soviet Union. The writers and journalists Werner Aspenström and Karl Vennberg supported democratic socialism and intended to reveal the aggressiveness of U.S.-American foreign policy. An extended and very emotional debate followed in which several politicians, journalists, writers, and political commentators engaged. Tingsten and Hedenius strongly criticized the third point of view which they believed to be a cowardly capitulation to Eastern European dictatorship. The historian Alf W. Johansson characterizes the conflict as a form of ideological spring cleaning conducted by the political establishment. Another historian, Anders Frenander, suggests that pushing back the third point of view was a way of limiting the influence of Marxism in the Swedish intellectual debate.<sup>12</sup> It was thus hard for radical leftist (and also conservative) intellectuals to gain a foothold in this political climate of consent and center policies.

The differences in left-wing intellectual positioning between Sweden and post-war France and Germany can be explained in terms of the war, the state and the role of the SAP. Left-wing intellectuals in France and Germany pursued belated anti-fascist struggles and, in this respect, positioned themselves as opponents of the state. Sweden, however, had not actively taken part in the war; in the 1950s, it seemed that the policy of neutrality meant guiltlessness. Prominent intellectuals (with a left political leaning) were incorporated into the state machinery as influential social engineers, while radical left-wing positions were marginalized. In this respect, the presence of a strong and governing social democratic party was crucial in Sweden because it integrated various academics.

## The Consolidation of the Left-Wing Intellectual

In Sweden, as elsewhere, the process of political radicalization can be traced back to the late 1950s when young intellectuals longed for political radicalism, but were unsure about what this radicalism should look like and how they should pursue it.<sup>13</sup> The young writer and rising star Sven Lindqvist expressed this urge for radicalism on several occasions. In his book *Ett Förslag* («A Proposition», 1955) he argued that contemporary Swedish writers acted like inhibited civil servants. Lindqvist wanted something catastrophic to happen that would make the Swedish people wake up and force them to think about the fundamental questions of life. People, he argued, needed something to believe in and they wanted to be needed. He believed that there were no longer any economic or social proletarians in contemporary Sweden. However, he suggested that there was an emotional proletariat longing for new and meaningful experiences. Lindqvist called for an emotional revolution.<sup>14</sup>

During the 1960s, the Swedish intellectual »field« changed considerably, since radical writers and academics established new left-wing intellectual ideals. In his book *Samtida Bekännelser av en Europeisk Intellektuell* («Confessions of a Disloyal European»), the writer Jan Myrdal told a metaphorical narrative about European intellectuals and their actions, or rather their lack of actions. Myrdal pictured himself as part of a »particular

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<sup>12</sup> Runeby 1985; Johansson 1995; Frenander 1999, chs. 4–6.

<sup>13</sup> Östberg 2002b, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> Lindqvist 1955, p. 11–16, 30–34.

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intellectual tradition«, i.e. the European tradition. His tone of voice was accusatory. European intellectuals had been aware of the horrors of the 20th century, but had not done anything to stop them. What Myrdal hinted at were the Holocaust, Stalinism, and the colonial wars, and he felt a collective remorse. He also embraced the European intellectual tradition which demanded to break with the colonial heritage. Being critical of society was not enough, one also had to influence the course of history. Or to put it differently: One had to act like an intellectual, which meant to intervene in politics.<sup>15</sup> Two years after Myrdal's *Bekännelser*, the writer Göran Palm published *En Orättvis Beträktelse* (»An Unfair Reflection«). This book can also be interpreted as a way of molding the new »left-wing intellectual«. Palm argued that Sweden's self-image as a rather decent country on the outskirts of Europe – one that had managed to maintain its moral innocence – was a misperception. The Western world had founded its power and wealth on colonialism, imperialism, and fascism. Sweden had been a part in all that and could no longer hide it. Like Myrdal, Palm discussed the role of intellectuals in terms of morals and culpability.<sup>16</sup>

Another concept of the »left-wing intellectual« was articulated by the Swedish New Left. The term »New Left« sometimes defines the movement of 1968 in general and sometimes a particular direction of the left.<sup>17</sup> In this article, the term refers to a distinct group of Swedish intellectuals who called themselves the New Left and who published their manifesto *En Ny Vänster* (»A New Left«) in 1966. The authors were Göran Therborn, Lars Ola Borglind, Gunnar Olofsson and Rune Wiklund, all of them academics and social scientists. They started out as social democrats, but during the events of 1968 most of them left the party or were eventually excluded.

The international New Left had a clear-cut intellectual approach. Academics and students were supposed to use sophisticated analytical methods in order to understand society and promote radicalization. The Swedish New Left followed suit and supported an idealistic worldview, according to which the construction of a new society was indeed possible. In a similar fashion as Myrdal and Palm, the New Left wanted to connect Sweden with European intellectualism. They pictured Sweden as a peripheral and mentally backward state without any intellectual tradition. Major intellectual currents, like Marxism and existentialism, had never taken root in Sweden, they argued. The New Left gazed longingly at Europe and thought of themselves as a modernizing power of the Swedish intellectual tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Even though these three examples did not represent all left-wing intellectuals in Sweden at the time, they constituted the most explicit articulations of »the leftist intellectual« in the public debate. All of them made important contributions to the introduction and consolidation of a new left-wing intellectual identity. Myrdal and Palm emphasized »the intellectual« as being a moralist very much in the vein of Emile Zola. The New Left particularly promoted the idea that »the intellectual« should be an ideologist. The different concepts could easily

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<sup>15</sup> Myrdal 1964, pp. 38, 149–150.

<sup>16</sup> Palm 1966, pp. 7–14.

<sup>17</sup> Gosse 2005, pp. 2, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Therborn 1966.

be combined with each other; they were partly overlapping. It is noteworthy that these new left-wing intellectuals put an end to the language of neutrality that had still been used by the initiators of the third-way debate. Instead, the young leftists connected Sweden not only to European intellectualism, but also to European culpability.

## Literary and Academic Intellectuals

There was a wide span of left-wing intellectual positions in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s. One of the most prominent literary left-wing intellectuals at the time was Sara Lidman. She contributed to the making of »the left-wing intellectual« in contemporary Sweden by intensively dealing with questions of moral and culpability. In her book *Jag och min Son* (»Me and my Son«, 1966), she did this by referring to *apartheid* in South Africa. She was also strongly opposed to the war in Vietnam with which she dealt in another book, *Samtal i Hanoi* (»Dialogue in Hanoi«, 1966). A few years later, she published the report *Gruva* (»Coalmine«, 1968) about the working conditions of the miners in Malmbergen, which helped to bring about the vast strike at the Swedish mining company *Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag* (LKAB) in 1969–70. Lidman was not particularly concerned about theoretical issues. However, the way in which she displayed and molded political engagement was highly influential. Lidman satisfied the longing for the emotional radicalism called upon by Lindqvist in the late 1950s.

In Sweden's public debate, it was primarily the literary intellectuals who paved the way for the new radical intellectual climate. The universities were initially not at the forefront. Östberg has described the Swedish universities as highly conservative and tardy. The social sciences were radicalized first, while the humanities were even more conservative. As a consequence, students and young radical academics had to confront what they considered to be an unprogressive and detached institution and had to look for theoretical inspiration not in contemporary Sweden, but internationally or in the past. In order to further critical discussions and develop new research theories and methods, radical students and academics were forced to create a proper academic setting on their own. Consequently, several new journals were launched and new academic associations founded. In Lund, the journal *Zenit* was turned into a free-standing socialist organ. *Unga Filosofer* (»The Association of Young Philosophers«), founded in Stockholm in 1965, started to publish the journals *Kommentar* (»Comment«) and *Häftan för Kritiska Studier* (»Journal for Critical Studies«) in 1968. These initiatives paved the way for Marxist research and brought about new impulses to university teaching and academic research.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most well-known academic intellectuals dealing with Marxist issues was the historian of ideas Sven-Eric Liedman. His research focused on Marxist ideology, which he thought should be critically assessed. Liedman was also critical of Maoism. In some way an opposite pole to Liedman was the renowned academic intellectual and economic historian Bo Gustafsson who had been active in *Svenska Clartéförbundet* (»The Swedish Clarté League«) in Uppsala during the 1950s. A decade later, *Clarté* became a communist and Maoist association closely connected to *Kommunistiska Förbundet Marxist-Leninisterna* (»Communist League Marxists-Leninists«; KFML)

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<sup>19</sup> Östberg 2002b, pp. 72–80.



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and simultaneously Gustafsson became a Marxist-Leninist, too. When KFML separated from the Communist party, Gustafsson was appointed chairman of the new association. His books *Från Kolonialism till Socialism* (»From Colonialism to Socialism«, 1964) and *Marxism och Revisionism* (»Marxism and Revisionism«, 1979) distinctly influenced the left-wing intellectual debate at the time. KFML with its Maoist, Marxist-Leninist ideology was at the forefront of the Swedish '68-rebellion and dominated large parts of the resistance against the Vietnam War. Thus, it had a strong influence on the left-wing debate.<sup>20</sup>

### The Collaboration Strategy of the Swedish State: Problem or Solution for the Radical Left?

In Sweden, the rebellion of 1968 developed quite rapidly and soon fell into troublesome consideration when it was evident that the revolution would not come about as easily as expected. One particular challenge for the radical left in Sweden was the SAP, which was a problem in two different ways. On the one hand, the party seemed to be an aggressive opponent harshly attacking the radical left. In the eyes of the radical left, the Swedish Social Democratic Party had betrayed the revolution and the working class. A fierce debate was caused by the TV broadcast *Från Socialism till Ökad Jämlikhet* (»From Socialism to Increased Equality«) in 1971. Responsible for the broadcast were left-wing intellectuals usually working with the journal *Zenit*. However, social democrats considered it a scandal that such a severe criticism against the party was conveyed via public service television.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the SAP also showed a softer side and was prepared to negotiate with the protest movements. Historians have noted that the Swedish social democratic government at the time allowed for criticism of the state by giving aid and grants to radical organizations, periodicals, and theater groups. The purpose of this policy was political integration. By taking advantage of the protests and the radical movements, the state could incorporate new political areas such as environment, gender, or youth issues. Labor markets, working life, housing, and family policy were also affected.<sup>22</sup> In a speech delivered in 1969, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme pointed out that a radical debate had been going on for a while. His conclusion was that

we must take advantage of the radical wave. We should let the rising wave help us; we shall in all our activities make the most of that wave so that it can bring us as far ahead as possible.<sup>23</sup>

The radical left had to take a clear stance with regard to this integration policy. In 1972, the first report of the Cultural Council (*Kulturrådet*) caused a lively debate. The Cultural Council should illustrate the functionality of the integration policy and should also serve as an investigative body of the government in order to consider

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<sup>20</sup> Salomon 1996, p. 320.

<sup>21</sup> Ljunggren 2009, p. 210.

<sup>22</sup> Salomon 1996, pp. 174–175; Östberg 2008, pp. 366–369; Östberg 2002b, pp. 153–154; Etzemüller 2005, pp. 218–221; Sejersted 2005, pp. 364, 385–389; Florin & Nilsson 2000, pp. 74–82.

<sup>23</sup> »Vi måste utnyttja den våg som finns och som är radikal. Vi skola ta hjälp av den stigande vågen, vi skola i alla våra göranden och låtanden söka sätta in vårt yttersta för att den vågen må kunna fora oss så långt framåt som möjligt.« (NSD 5/1 1969, in vol. 2.4.0:015, Olof Palmes Arkiv, Arbetarrörelsens arkiv).



several cultural requirements discussed in the public debate of the time. Among the Council's members were several left-wing intellectuals. The first Council report presented an overarching cultural policy to promote equality and a good social environment.<sup>24</sup> While the report was praised for its cultural radicalism, many left-wing activists remained critical, to a large extent for ideological reasons. They felt that the report did not adequately consider the need to change society; instead, it allegedly supported culture as a form of compensation for societal injustice. A discussion followed about the meaning of culture and about whether it was possible to be critical of society and be financially supported by it at the same time. Was it some kind of manipulation to receive financial support from the state? Was it not a way of controlling the political debate? Was a free culture possible at all? Similar criticism was directed towards the general integration policy of the social democrats. Some political activists warned that this policy could become a way of controlling and disciplining the protest movement.<sup>25</sup>

### **Intellectualism or Collaboration?: Strategies to Deal with the Collaboration Strategy of the Swedish State**

This discussion influenced, of course, the understanding of »the leftist intellectual«. Some left-wing activists argued in favor of a more intellectual approach by presenting »the intellectual« as a specific type of particular importance, displaying traits distinct from ordinary people. This form of intellectualism was repeatedly presented as a way of combating the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state.<sup>26</sup>

The most ambitious and publicly most debated attempt to further intellectualism for the cause of combating the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state was a book by Jan Myrdal written together with Lars Gustafsson. This book, *Den Onödiga Samtiden* (»Our Unnecessary Age«, 1974), based on written correspondence between Myrdal and Gustafsson, was intended as an answer to the crisis of the left. Gustafsson listed the greatest disappointments while Myrdal presented solutions and argued that a revolution was both possible and necessary. Gustafsson had never been a Marxist, but Myrdal, who was an adherent of Marxism-Leninism, convinced Gustafsson that Marx had been right on crucial issues. The book set out to confirm that the revolutionary left was still strong.

The book also called for an intellectual positioning and strongly criticized the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state. Especially Gustafsson was concerned that the state appeased criticism by incorporating it. He feared that political criticism had become a way to legitimize the dominant political order, instead of challenging it. Thus, he longed for sharp conflicts between clear-cut opponents, as it had been the case in Sweden at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Intellectualism was an important trait of this book. Although Myrdal still wanted to distance himself from academic approaches, he believed that it was time to become theoretical – more so than ever before

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<sup>24</sup> SOU 1972:66, pp. 19, 143–147, 171; Östberg 2008, pp. 317–319; Hoogland 2005, p. 297.

<sup>25</sup> Lysander & Pleijel 1973, pp. 164, 166, 168; Jansson, Stolpe & Hofsten 1973, pp. 174–176, 182; Noren 1973; Fredelius 1973.

<sup>26</sup> Bergmark 1972, pp. 6–9, 179–197, 217; Zennström 1973; Therborn 1973, pp. 202–208, quot. 208; Rönning 1973; Berggren & Pleijel 1974; Pleijel 1972; Holm & Holmgren 1972; Bergom-Larsson 1972.

<sup>27</sup> Gustafsson & Myrdal 1974, pp. 12, 17, 125, 174, 188.

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– in order to solve the problems of the left. Intellectualism in this fashion could be a proper way to combat the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state and to regain a criticism of society worthy of its name.<sup>28</sup>

A contradictory way of positioning »the left-wing intellectual« was presented by Göran Palm. His main ambition was to reach out to the people and to mobilize them politically, but he was worried that the working class would not respond to these efforts. The Swedish radical left, especially its Marxist-Leninist branch KFML, made great efforts to reach out to and engage the working class by infiltrating the workplaces, albeit with little success – the workers held the radical leftists at bay.<sup>29</sup> Keen to overcome these obstacles, Palm worked two years in the L. M. Ericsson factory and wrote two books about it. During his employment he arrived at the conclusion that people in general feared revolution and that they were not particularly interested in international politics. Palm, however, did not want to blame ordinary people for their political shortcomings; instead, he tried to understand them. Most of all, he criticized left-wing activists and intellectuals for being too far away from workers. It would be about time to speak with the ordinary people, to listen to them and to learn from them.

It was more important for Palm to establish contact with the working people than to read Marx closely. His project may thus be described as a way of deconstructing the concept of the »working class«, as well as that of »the intellectual«. Believing that workers were unintellectual was wrong and merely destructive prejudice. He wanted to do away with prejudices and create a spirit of comradeship instead. Knowledge was not only to be defined academically. Equally important to reading books and attending political meetings were the personal experiences of living in a class society. Palm further stated that intellectuals did not actually exist as a particular stratum of society. His fairly inclusive definition of »the intellectual« was: »anyone who independently and actively understands«. In this way, the word »intellectual« was disconnected from literary knowledge and particularly from university education. Palm did not believe that there was a fundamental difference between students and workers.<sup>30</sup>

Simultaneously, Palm's general political worldview changed considerably. His radical internationalism, his revolutionary approach and his perception of a worldwide class struggle from the 1960s disappeared. Instead, he devoted himself to reformist political work in order to change society rather gradually. He increasingly appreciated the trade unions, while he became critical of extreme left-wing organizations, which repeatedly went on strike without taking responsibility.<sup>31</sup>

Palm thus approached the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state quite differently from Myrdal and Gustafsson, which was crucial for their highly dissimilar ways of perceiving »the intellectual«. According to the radical Marxist Myrdal, a clear-cut intellectualism was necessary in order to defend revolution and criticism of a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 39, 49, 74, 209–226, quot. p. 224.

<sup>29</sup> Salomon 1996, pp. 186–196.

<sup>30</sup> Palm 1972, pp. 98–99, 163–173, quot. p. 83, 162.

<sup>31</sup> Palm 1974, pp. 68–69, 103, 321.

state which tried to moderate its critics by incorporating them into welfare policies. Palm's approach was quite the opposite. He dismantled »the intellectual« and made this category accessible for almost everyone. This altered concept of »the intellectual« was adopted in order to cooperate with the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state and to reach the working people.

### **The Making of »The Good Left-Wing Intellectual« – Between State, SAP and the Social Movement**

The above-mentioned books of Myrdal and Palm were received quite differently and caused extensive debate. Myrdal had never been criticized so strongly before, and his book led to a lively debate. The criticism was manifold, but interestingly enough it partly developed into a discussion on »the intellectual«. The word »academic« was used in a negative way in order to accuse the two writers as arrogant and showing off because they were widely read. The influential reviewer, Olof Lagercrantz, accused Myrdal and Gustafsson of being intellectual snobs and other reviewers followed suit. Still, some reviewers defended them and warned against anti-intellectualism.<sup>32</sup>

Palm's L. M. Ericsson-books were instead received with acclamation by the reviewers. Many believed that his ideas were the proper solution for the left and that this was the right way to deal with the feelings of delusion. The debate was thorough and comprehensive. Politicians, as well as unionists, showed an interest in Palm's propositions. Reviewers in the daily press were delighted to meet a reformist instead of a revolutionary. Palm gained credibility because he actually listened to the workers. He confirmed that society could be changed, but in another way than perceived by the revolutionary left.<sup>33</sup> In the discussions about Myrdal's and Palm's books, reformism became a political stance that demanded specific requirements on how one should behave as an intellectual. »The reformist intellectual« was asked to keep a low profile in order not to stick out.

Similar traits characterized the extended debate on the relationship between »the left-wing intellectual« and social democracy of 1976. As we have seen above, social democracy tried to deal with the protest storm in the 1960s and 1970s by incorporating demands of the radical left into welfare policies. This strategy was successful in terms of policy-making. Yet, the SAP did not succeed in winning over the followers of the radical left, which was a major concern for party officials. In 1976, the journalist Gunnar Fredriksson opened a debate on the hostility among left-wing intellectuals towards social democracy. The debate that followed was one of the biggest ever in the social democratic newspaper *Aftonbladet*.<sup>34</sup>

Fredriksson was concerned about the lack of support for the SAP among leftist intellectuals, and he expressed

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<sup>32</sup> Lagercrantz 1974; Hedenberg 1974; Hedberg 1974; Braconier 1974; Bladh 1974; 'Upp slavar, mina bröder' 1974; Håkansson 1974; Almerud 1974.

<sup>33</sup> Palm 1974, pp. 56–58; Lagercrantz 1972; Grahn 1974; Svenningsson 1974; Persson 1972; Andersson 1972; Bladh 1972; Eggerhorn 1973; Eriksson 1974; Lutti 1972; Grahn 1974; Örnberg 1972; Carlsson 1974; Björkenvall 1974.

<sup>34</sup> Fredriksson & Andersson 1976.

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opinions about intellectuals similar to those of social democrats during the interwar period and the 1950s. He seems to have taken it for granted that leftist intellectuals should engage themselves in the social democratic project. Now, they did not, and this puzzled him. Interestingly, in this context, is the way Fredriksson defined »the intellectual«. Firstly, he associated the figure with left-wing ideology, particularly with the extreme left. Secondly, he described intellectuals as snobs, not patient enough to take part in the »dull« political work carried out regularly in the political grassroots organizations.

The debate displayed two important notions. According to the first, there was nothing remarkable about being an intellectual, since anyone could be one. The second notion was that »the intellectual« was an extreme, political phenomenon opposed to everyday political work.<sup>35</sup> At stake here was also the importance attached to non-bourgeois behavior within the SAP. Among social democrats bourgeois values and lifestyle patterns have continuously been perceived as a threat towards a proper culture within the party.<sup>36</sup> Left-wing intellectuals were now attacked for being too radical and too bourgeois at the same time.

The SAP thus emphasized collaboration and political consent, while parts of the radical left mobilized intellectualism against the state. Aware of this development, several political commentators began to speak about »the intellectual« as an uncompromising figure for which there was no room in a political culture of consensus, collaboration, and political integration. In the above-mentioned debates, notions took shape about what it meant to be a good or a bad »left-wing intellectual«. In this sense, the »bad left-wing intellectual« was equated with political extremism, social distinction and overemphasized intellectualism, while the »good left-wing intellectual« was associated with state collaboration, reformism and a less distinctive intellectual identity. The »good« and the »bad« left-wing intellectual were not explicit concepts; they rather came to the fore implicitly in forms of contrasting judgments.

Yet another manifestation of the collaboration and less distinctive intellectual ideal was the concept of »the cultural worker« that surfaced in Sweden during the 1970s. The expression can be traced back to 1929, but it had its breakthrough during the 1960s and the 1970s. The term has since then been more significant in Sweden than in other countries. Many languages, in fact, lack an equivalent. It was partly a consequence of the interaction between the '68-left and the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state that this concept gained a foothold in the Swedish language. In the first report of the Cultural Council in 1972, the term »cultural worker« appeared in discussions about how to satisfy the needs of interest organizations within art, literature, film, and theater. The concept »cultural worker« defined cultural activities in terms of work, equality and unionist demands rather than in terms of sublimity or academic writing.<sup>37</sup>

The »good left-wing intellectual« was a position which, interestingly enough, many leftists were ready to accept.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 9–11, 16–23, 26, 37–40, 53–54, 56, 60, 70–71, 81, 92, 99, 103, 106, 114, 118, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Pauli 2012, p. 100.

<sup>37</sup> *SOU* 1972:66, pp. 148–149; *SOU* 1972:67, pp. 23–24; Almlöf 1979; Heurling 1981.

This was partly due to the fact that left-wing intellectuals were already used to downplaying their intellectual profiles. Since the last years of the 1960s, the ideal of sociability had been important. This meant that intellectuals, instead of being intellectualists, should rather understate their identities in order not to distance themselves too much from ordinary people. The importance of sociability was partly a consequence of the strong identification with the social movement among many left intellectuals. One of the main characteristics of the '68-movement in Sweden was that it strived for a mass mobilization of the people. Reaching out to them required a low-key intellectual profile so that one had to adapt. The student movement played a less important role in Sweden than in, for instance, Germany or Denmark. The same can be said about subversive anti-authoritarian methods and the intellectual avant-garde policy. Many Swedish left-wing radicals believed that provocative public manifestations were far less suitable methods than traditional political propaganda, like demonstrations, fundraising, study circles or strikes.<sup>38</sup>

The »good left-wing intellectual« was thus shaped through the interaction of social movements, the state, and the SAP, and with active assistance from the media. It was based on a leftist attitude which accommodated both dealing with the state as well as reaching out to the people and gaining media approval. However, the concept of the »good left-wing intellectual« must be regarded as an ideal type; certainly not every intellectual showed all of its characteristics. Also in Sweden, there were clear-cut intellectuals and not everyone turned reformist from one day to the other. Yet, the moderate intellectual distinctiveness was a highly normative stance that intellectuals in some way or another had to relate to during the late 1960s and 1970s. To put it in other words, the modest intellectual identity was a stance that different political positions could agree upon. This means that the discourse on the »left-wing intellectual« in Sweden at the time differed considerably from the type that had developed in contemporary France and Germany where high-brow intellectualism characterized the critical and radical mind.

## **The 1980s – a New Era?**

The historian Rikard Hoogland has argued that the state collaboration policy disciplined and prevented the so-called free theater groups in Sweden which were therefore less influential than they had hoped.<sup>39</sup> However, my notion is the opposite: The collaboration strategy of the Swedish state did not push back the radical left, but enforced and substantiated it by supporting it financially on the one hand, while channeling it into more moderate modes of expression on the other hand – as we have seen above it happened in the debates concerning the »good« left-wing intellectual in Sweden during the 1970s. In addition, post-war cultural radicalism had pushed back any form of cultural conservatism already in the 1950s, and in the 1970s, the liberal intellectual opposition was also a flaw.<sup>40</sup> Both the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state and the weak liberal and conservative counter-intellectualism provided the basis for a considerably strong position of the Swedish leftists, particularly within the

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<sup>38</sup> Salomon 1996, pp. 114–115, 118, 186–191, 196, 205.

<sup>39</sup> Hoogland 2005. For a general analysis of the '68-movement's cultural policy and for a criticism of Hoogland, see Bergman 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Ljunggren 2009, pp. 266–268; Berggren 2010; Arvidsson 2008, pp. 125–126.

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cultural debate, during the late 1960s and the 1970s. In the 1970s, the intellectual left dominated the political and cultural debate in Sweden perhaps even more than in France or Germany.

At the end of the 1970s, the Swedish employer's association (SAF) began to mobilize against what they perceived to be the left-wing hegemony within Sweden's cultural and political debate. They founded the publishing houses *Ratio* and *Timbro* and supported what they felt to be appropriate public voices.<sup>41</sup> At the beginning of the 1980s, the ideological climate began to gradually change. Researchers have described this change as a »turn to the right« as well as a »neoliberal attack«.<sup>42</sup>

In 1980, a debate about the so-called »media left« took place on the cultural pages of the two most influential papers in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. Even this debate was dominated by Myrdal and Gustafsson, but it also featured comments of Sven Fagerberg and Sven Delblanc. Myrdal and Gustafsson continued to confront the Swedish state and to criticize contemporary Swedish intellectuals. Especially Gustafsson fiercely attacked the public sector arguing that Swedish intellectuals had become a new and, by the public sector, buttressed class which had made them blind and powerless. This debate indicated the advent of an ideological turning point. From now on, criticism was rather directed against the state than against capitalism. New concepts were introduced and discussed in the Swedish public debate. A notion vague enough to be accepted by the political left as well as by the political right was the extensively debated »civic society«. Neoliberalism had gained force, but as the historian Anders Frenander has concluded, it is not correct to describe the 1980s in terms of a turn to the right. Although the left was put under more pressure than during the 1970s, it had by no means been defeated.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned earlier, it has on several occasions been argued that the intellectual left, even if politically less powerful than before, managed to uphold its hegemony within Swedish cultural debate and cultural life, that is, within literature, theater, art, academic research and teaching, and not the least cultural journalism. Whether this has been true from the 1980s until today has not been discussed in this article. I do, however, suggest that the left-wing intellectuals in Sweden successfully managed to uphold a particular stable position in Swedish cultural debate during the late 1960s and the 1970s and that they continued to profit from this legacy for quite a while thereafter. Right-wing intellectuals and social democrats mobilized politically, however not as much in »the cultural field« which has therefore continued to be dominated by the political left. To a large extent, »the cultural field« was so-to-speak passed over to the left intellectuals. To put it in a perhaps incisive wording, one might even suggest that an implicit contract took shape, according to which SAP took care of politics and the radical left was allotted the culture, a »settlement« which favoured both parts and in a broad sense strengthened left political values in Sweden's public debate.

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<sup>41</sup> Boréus 1994.

<sup>42</sup> Boréus 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Frenander 1999, pp. 378, 380.

## Conclusion

In post-war France and Germany, questions of collaboration and feelings of war guilt mobilized left-wing intellectuals, who pursued belated anti-fascism and took a critical stance towards the state and the governing political parties. In neutral Sweden at the time, the question of guilt was not a mobilizing issue. Instead, the governing SAP successfully recruited popular academics from the moderate left. In the public debate, marked by strong anti-communism and political consent at the same time, it was hard for radical left-wing intellectuals to gain a foothold at all. The Swedish intellectual setting changed rapidly from 1964 to 1968, when a young generation of left-wing intellectuals, by connecting Sweden to European culpability, developed new distinctive ideas about what it meant to be an intellectual. Now, »the left-wing intellectual« was shaped as a moralist and ideologist in Swedish public debate on the one hand and on the other as a highly sophisticated scholar of Marxism in academic life. These ideals were decidedly linked to the social movements of the era.

The radical left that had been rather weak not long ago suddenly dominated Sweden's intellectual debate. This happened for two reasons: Firstly, the liberal and conservative intellectual counter-mobilization against the left remained weak for a long period during the 1960s and 1970s, which made it possible for the radical left to dominate the »cultural field«. Secondly, in contrast to what has sometimes been argued in previous research, I suggest that the collaboration strategy of the Swedish state by simultaneously supporting and curbing the radical left strengthened, rather than weakened, the position of the Swedish left-wing intellectuals during the 1960s and 1970s – and probably even longer, although this still needs to be researched. In this context, I have also proposed that an implicit settlement took shape that assigned the culture to the left and the politics to the SAP, which was an arrangement that in a broad sense further helped to sustain left political values in Sweden's public debate.

The interaction between the SAP, the state, and the radical left also shaped what it meant to be a »good left-wing intellectual«. Cultural journalists, political commentators and even representatives of the radical left pictured »the good left-wing intellectual« in terms of state collaboration, reformism, sociability and being a »cultural worker« rather than in terms of radical sophistication, high-brow intellectual confrontation or academic writing. In addition, Swedish »movement intellectuals« promoted the idea that intellectuals should not detach themselves from ordinary people, but rather tone down their intellectual identities by cultivating positions that were not too sharp and distinctive. Although not every single leftist author, academic, or artist adopted this ideal, or did not adopt it completely, it certainly had an impact. In some way or another, this was an attitude that one had to relate to, and simultaneously an attitude that colored the idea of what it meant to be a left-wing intellectual in Sweden. This type represented an intellectual stance that could easily interact with the state while simultaneously reaching parts of the population and satisfying the media establishment – all of which further strengthened the left-wing intellectuals' public and cultural significance.



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